



NEWS RELEASE

Anniston Chemical Activity



October 21, 2009

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ANCDF OPERATIONS CURTAILED FOR MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

ANNISTON ARMY DEPOT, Ala. (October 21, 2009) - Operations at the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ANCDF) have been temporarily curtailed while Westinghouse Anniston maintenance teams work in an Explosion Containment Room (ECR) to remove a 4.2-inch mustard agent-filled mortar after a small flame was encountered when removing components from it yesterday.

According to ANCDF officials, this occurred at 2 p.m. during routine disposal operations while robotic equipment in a specially designed blast containment room, with concrete walls 2 feet thick, was being used to remove the mortar fuze and burster. A flame was detected where the equipment grips the fuze and burster to rotate and remove them. The small flame lasted approximately 10-15 seconds.

There was no explosion. There was no damage to ANCDF processing equipment. Because remote controlled, robotic equipment was being used, no one was in the immediate vicinity and no one was injured. Some of the gallon of mustard agent in the mortar spilled onto the floor in the room.

Engineering designs of the facility prevented any agent vapor from escaping into other areas of the ANCDF or to the outside environment. Neither the community nor the ANCDF work force was at any risk.

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NEWS RELEASE

Anniston Chemical Activity



Page 2

October 21, 2009

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ANCDF maintenance teams will dress in protective suits before entering the ECR. Once in the room, the team will place the mortar in a container that will be sealed and returned to storage for disposal at a later date. The teams will also clean up the spilled agent and decontaminate the area.

Mustard munition disposal operations at the ANCDF began in early July. To date, 42,683 mortars and 20,334 gallons of mustard agent have been safely demilitarized. Full ANCDF disposal operations are expected to resume later today or tomorrow after the maintenance teams complete their activities.

Site and U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency (CMA) officials will study the event to see what can be learned with an eye to predicting and preventing a similar situation in the future at the ANCDF and at the other U.S. chemical munition disposal sites.

Chemical munition stockpile demilitarization activities in Anniston began in August 2003. Since then, 404,485 munitions (rockets, artillery shells, land mines, and mortars) accounting for more than 61 percent of the Anniston stockpile have been safely processed. That includes 313,337 gallons of liquid nerve agent (GB and VX) and mustard agent (60.8 percent).

Nationally, the CMA demilitarization operations have accounted for the safe disposal of 2,231,794 munitions (64.8 percent of the U.S. stockpile) and 21,151 tons of chemical agent.

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